

ain't no sunshine (when she's gone) by OneDreamADay

Series: [human nature \[2\]](#)

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Relationships: Eleven/Jane Ives/Jane Hopper & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Eleven/Jane Ives/Jane Hopper & Sara Hopper, Eleven/Jane Ives/Jane Hopper & Terry Ives, Karen Wheeler & Nancy Wheeler, Mike Wheeler & Nancy Wheeler

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Summary:

Jane Hopper and Nancy Wheeler both know what it's like to live with the ghost of a sibling long gone.

(RoleSwapAU)

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Author's Note:

unbeta'ed so any spelling errors are mine.

When Jane Hopper is ten, her little sister dies of cancer.

They weren't biologically related; Jane knows that her dad and mom met at a bar and the result was her nine months later (or so the gossip in Hawkins goes; Jane has never directly asked her parents about this). But for whatever reason, whatever relationship they had didn't work and both were fine separating; both devoted their time raising Jane and she grew happy enough in her early years.

Even when her step-sister, Sara Hopper, was born, Jane was excited about having a little sister, and her step-mother did her best to make Jane feel like she wasn't be forgotten or replaced in the midst of her dad busy with the baby.

The problem starts when Sara becomes sick.

She watches her sister go from her bubbly, if sometimes annoying to someone whose illness takes all of her dad's attention and energy.

Even though she shouldn't be, Jane is jealous.

Very quickly, she's tired of being Jane Hopper with the sick little sister.

But she does her best to work through it; she helps reads to Sara when Sara's mother and their dad are too tired, she coaxes her to eat and smiles when she's the only one who manages to get the little girl to take a bite

Jane hangs on the idea that Sara's going to get better, and then life will go back to normal; they won't have to make so many visits to the hospital, where the medical smell never seem to get out of her clothes. And everyone will stop looking at Sara like she'll break, and everyone at school will stop giving Jane sad looks and "it's okay if you mess up on an assignment, Jane, we know your family is going

through a lot.”

Though it does give her a free pass after she punches Troy for making fun of Dustin, so it has its perks at times.

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But Sara doesn't get better.

Sara dies, and it's like having a rug pulled from under Jane and her family.

Suddenly it's like she's angry all the time, sometimes over nothing (“you're grieving, honey, it's normal.” Mom said for the fifth time that week); Dad's sad and drinks all the time and her step-mom is pretending that Jane doesn't exist at all. Jane zones out for most of her sister's funeral; she can't stand to think about her sister in that tiny coffin, all alone with no one to read her stories or play with. No one there to comfort her and sneak her candy, even though they both know Jane will probably eat because the chemo leaves Sara with little to no appetite.

Jane doesn't even realize she's crying until Aunt Becky pulls her into a hug and wipes her tears.

A year after Sara's death, her dad and stepmom divorce, her stepmom moves to the city with little fanfare. Her dad moves to a little trailer just on the outskirts of the town, and Jane...

Well, Jane finds herself drifting further from her dad.

There's a heaviness that exists between her family, with her parents really only speaking if they really need to (and mostly about Jane herself these days and beyond that, they have little to no communication). She watches as her dad deals with his grief with booze and pills and it makes her bitter on the inside.

A functioning addict, her mom calls her dad.

You have another daughter, you know. You have me. I'm still here. Jane wants to say.

Instead, whenever she visits him, Jane helps clean up the empty bottles and smiles if her dad asks if everything is okay.

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Nancy Wheeler's house is haunted.

Not by a ghost or a poltergeist, but rather a memory of a person long gone.

To any outsiders, the Wheeler family looks like a normal family of three; mother, father, teenage daughter.

But inside the family, their home is haunted by the missing member of their family, her younger brother, Micheal.

He would've twelve now, but whenever Nancy tries to imagine him, all she can see is a chubby-faced toddler, taken for reasons unknown except for the person or people who kidnapped him.

Micheal's room is like a shrine now; his crib is still there, along with his old stuffed animals. (The only one that is missing is a stuffed lion that was with him the day he disappeared.) There are a few pictures that her mother left in the room, the one of him that they had taken before his disappearance.

One is a picture that they used for his missing poster and when the media caught wind of the case, they used the same photo; Micheal smiling at the camera, Nancy holding him in her lap. It was taken a month before his disappearance, during their dad's birthday party.

Sometimes, Nancy wonders how different their family would be had her brother not disappeared in that crowded mall.

Would their mother still be a hovering presence over all her kids? Would her dad still be mentally checked out?

Nancy has a lot of 'what-ifs' that she deals with over the years.

One is 'what if I watched over Micheal more closely that day?'

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"Mike, c'mon, stop being a brat and come on!" Nancy puts her hand on her hips, trying to imitate their mom, but all it does is make her little brother frown at her.

Ugh. Why little brothers have to be such a pain in the butt?

Currently, Nancy is trying to pry her brother away from the claw machine, but that only make Mike howl louder and point to a stuffed animal. "Gimme."

"No way!" Nancy huffs. "I'm not spending my last two quarters on something that!" She tries to grab her brother's hand and lead him back towards the play area, but he digs in his feet and Nancy rolls her eyes.

"Fine, stay here for all I care," She goes to sit on the bench across the machine, his red coat making it easy to pick him out in the gaggle of kids in the area.

She spots a friend from school, Barbara passing by with her mom and the two talking while Barb's mom goes to pick up some jewelry nearby. They end up talking, and before Nancy knows it, her mom is there. "Nancy, where's your brother?"

"Oh, he's right by the little coin machines. You know, the little claw machine." Nancy says, getting to her feet. "I left him over there because he kept crying and didn't want to move."

"You were supposed to keep an eye on him."

Nancy huffs. "I did, Mom! He's right over there!" They walk over to the area, only there's no Micheal, but there are a bunch of other kids crowded around the claw machine, fighting over whose turn is it next.

"Hey!" Nancy calls out to the group. "You guys seen my brother. 'Round three, with a red coat?"

The kids look at each and one girl says, "Oh, his mom came and got him already. They left a while ago."

It takes a moment for Nancy to realize exactly what's wrong with that

statement.

They deal with a lot, after her brother's kidnapping. No one saw anything suspicious, and for some reason, the video cameras that would've caught something important were not working, and the police have no real clues to work from.

There are roadblocks, and search dogs, and at first, the police tell them to have hope. That maybe there will be a ransom note or a phone call. Her mom parks herself by the phone for the first week, hoping for *something*.

A week goes by, then a month, then a year.

Slowly, the missing poster comes down. And instead of a living person, the search turns to maybe finding a body, his body. (They don't actually tell Nancy this, she finds this out from the news on the television.)

Her mom, once she's told this, has a nervous breakdown, and never really recovers from it. The first Christmas they have without her brother is full of forced happiness that breaks during dinner and her mom spends the rest of the week locked in her room. On Mike's fifth birthday, her mom starts a tradition of being completely zoned out, something that happens on his birthdays and on the anniversary of his kidnapping.

Her dad picks up more hours at work, leaving Nancy to help out on days when her mother's depression gets too bad and she stays in bed all day. There are the occasional good days, where they have actual conversations, and her mom is trying hard to be interested in how her daughter's day is going.

There are days where Nancy is sure that her mom blames her for

Mike's disappearance. She never outright says it, but it's a feeling that she has.

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For a while, her days exist in this type of new normal that's been created.

But then her best friend goes missing in the same week that the Byers' younger son disappeared and something is strange is going on, but she doesn't know what it is, but she sure as hell wants to get to the bottom of it.

Author's Note:

Technically, claw machines didn't really get popular until the 1980's, when they started popping up in Pizza Huts, arcades, and Chuck E. Cheese's. In 1974, the year Mike is kidnapped, the Johnson Act had been abandoned by the FBI the year previously, so they just started making appearances outside of carnivals and amusement parks. But I'm playing hard and loose with canon anyway so *shrug*

For those that don't know the Johnson Act (also known as the Transportation of Gambling Devices Act) was passed by Congress in 1951, with the intended effect to crack down on organized crime syndicates that had been profiting from slot machines and other gaming paraphernalia. It prohibited anyone from transporting an electronic device of chance across state lines, forcing operators to permanently park their traveling units. This included claw machines.

At some point, owners were under the impression that owning them was an offense(it wasn't, it was just transporting them that got people in trouble) and a lot of them were either hidden away or outright destroyed. The act was ended in 1974 after the FBI realized the act was fucking stupid and didn't

work at all.